

Mixt Effays

TRAGEDIES,

COMEDIES,

Upon Italian COMEDIES,

English COMEDIES,

And OPERA'S to his

Grace the Duke of *Buckingham*

Written Originally in FRENCH

By the *Sieur de Saint EUVREMONT.*

Licensed,

Rog. L'Estrange.

L O N D O N:

Printed for *Timothy Goodwin*, at the Maiden-
Head over against *St. Dunstan's*
Church in *Fleetstreet.*

1 6 8 7.

Mixt Essays

TRAGEDIES

COMEDIES

Upon Italian Comedies

English Comedies

and Opera to his

Grace the Duke of Buckingham

Written Originally in French

By the Hon. Mr. B. J. R. M. O. N. A.

London

Reg. L. P. P. ang.

L O N D O N

Printed for J. Smith, Comptroller at the Station
Head over against St. Dunstons
Church in Fleetstreet.

1 8 7

PREFACE

TO THE

Translation.

THe Theatre was wont to be called the School of Virtue, the Scene of Men and Manners; Aristotle himself, though an austere Critick, and a severe Philosopher, confessed that the Stage might conduce more to the Instruction and Refining of Mankind, than even Philosophy it self: It secretly insinuates that into many dull people, which the best Books, or grave Harangues could neuer do; the Eye being struck with the natural Impressions, and lively Representations of Virtue and Vice, conveys them quickly to the Soul; and there lodges them; who can see the Ambitious, the Proud, the Cruel, the Passionate, the Treacherous, the Prodigal, or Covetous Man acted to the life, without being an enemy to them; or the Magna-

PREFACE to the Translation.

animous, Liberal, Courageous, Just, Mild, Temperate, and Wise, without being a friend to, and imitator of them, the Reward and Pleasure of these being always as great as the Punishment and Pain of the other. Hence it was that the Greeks and Romans were civiliz'd above other Nations, instead of being idle they were employed daily in their Cirques, Theaters, and Amphitheaters, where they learnt insensibly what was great and useful; present objects raises lasting Idea's, whereas the Precepts of the Schools vanishes, and dwindles often into Air; the Memory will seldom part with any thing that comes in by the Eye, especially in so solemn and sensible a manner; the Image or Picture sticks close to the Brain, and can scarce be razed out with the all-devouring teeth of Time.

The late Age hath been so extremely sensible of the use of the Stage, that some of the most polite Scholars of Christendom have studied and practis'd nothing more than Aristotle, and Horace, Homer, and Virgil, Sophocles, and Euripides, Eschylus, Aristophanes, Plautus, and Terence. The Italians having a particular Sagacity above most of their Neighbours, began first to raise it from the Grave, where Goths and Vandals, and other Northern Barbarians, had

PREFACE to the Translation.

Had ~~but~~ ^{not} ~~it~~ ^{amongst} the Pomp and Glory of the World, their Academies took the Carcass up, and inspir'd it with Life, Shape, and some Vigour; those of the Crusca at Florence, the Ricovrati at Padua, and the Lyncei at Rome, have perform'd their parts; many of their Academicks began to write of the Stage, and Poetry; several judicious Criticks pass'd for and against the Amynta of Tasso, and the Pastor Fido of Guarini.

After the Italians the French took fire, and began to sublime and purifie themselves upon the rising of that glorious Minister Cardinal Richlieu, who founded the Royal Academy, and having muster'd the best Wits together, employ'd them in reforming the Stage, the Language, and Manners of his Country. L'Abbe Hedein undertook the Theater, of which he publish'd the most perfect Treatise yet extant; and if the Cardinal had liv'd some years longer, he would have carried it much higher, and even contend'd with Athens, and Rome themselves. Malherbe, Corneille, Chapelain, Moliere, Boileau, Fontaine, and Rapin, have cultivated, and exalted that Subject. The Learned Chanoine of St. Genevieve R. P. le Bossu, hath given us the best Idea, and most exact Model
of

PREFACE TO THE Translation.

✓ of *Epic Poem*. The Dutch and German (as though frozen up) have produced little in this kind; yet we must confess that Grotius, Heinsius, Scaliger, and Vossius were Learned Criticks. Some of the English have indeed raised their Pens, and soar'd as high as any of the Italians, or French; yet Criticism came but very lately in fashion amongst us; without doubt Ben. Johnson had a large stock of Critical Learning; ✓ Spencer had studied Homer, and Virgil, and Tasso, yet he was misled, and debauched by Ariosto, as Mr. Rymer judiciously observes; Davenant gives some strokes of great Learning and Judgment, yet he is far untraten Tracks, new Ways, and undiscover'd Seas; ✓ Cowley was a great Master of the Antients, and had the true Genius and Character of a Poet; yet this nicety and boldness of Criticism was a stranger all this time to our Climate; Mr. Rymer, and Mr. Dryden have begun to launch out into it, and indeed they have been very fortunate Adventurers. The Earls of R. and M. and Mr. W. have given some fine touches; Mr. Drydens Criticks are generally quaint and solid, his Prefaces doth as often correct and improve my Judgment, as his Verses doth charm my Fancy; he is every-where Sweet, Elegant, and

PREFACE to the Translation.

and Sublimity; the Poets and Criticks were yet
dom both so Conspicuous and Illustrious in one
man, as in him, except Rapsin, Mr. Rymers in
his incomparable Preface to Rapsin, and in his
Reflections upon some late Tragedies, hath giv-
ven sufficient proofs, that he hath studied and
understands Aristotle and Horace, Homer, and
Virgil, besides the Wits of all Countries and A-
ges; so that we may justly number him in the first
rank of Criticks, as having a most accomplish'd
Idea of Poetry, and the Stage.

What Monsieur Euvremont hath perform'd
in these his Essays upon Comedy, Tragedy, and
Opera's, the Reader will be best able to judge
upon the perusal of them; they seem to be nice,
and delicate, thoughtful and judicious, grounded
upon Observation, and Reflection, though some may
perhaps think them dash'd here and there with a
little French levity and vanity; which if so, is
the more excusable, considering the Gallantry, the
Variety, and Nature of his Subject. If his Pen
marches any where rough and peevish, it is
upon the Athenian Tragedians, upon the I-
talian Comedy, and Opera's, upon Machines,
and Decorations; otherwise it runs smoothly
and gently enough, seeing true Criticks are sel-
dom

PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION

dem. complaisant, we count with Minions,
or Mistresses, all must go to the Touchstone, or
Furnace, and if the trial is not made according
to Rule and Art, then the Critick must be made,
or shut himself up in a Tower, and there
Reflection upon some late Translation
even sufficient proof, that he had not
understand Aristotle and Horace, Horace
Virgil, besides the Wits of all Christian
ages; so that we may justly number him in the
rank of Critics, as having a well-learned
idea of Poetry, and the Stage.

What Monsieur Racine has to forward
in these his Essay upon Comedy, Tragedy, and
Opera, the Reader will be best inform'd
upon the perusal of them; they seem to be
written, thoughtful and judicious, grounded
upon Observation, and Reflection; though some may
perhaps think them dull, and that the
little French learning and wit, which is
the more excusable, considering the Gallantry, the
Variety, and Nature of his subject. If his
manner, any where rough and harsh, it is
upon the French Tragedians, upon the
Italian Comedy, and Opera, upon Aristotle
and Decartes; otherwise it is smooth
and gently easy, and the Critick will

UPON TRAGEDIES.

I Confess we excel in the works of the Theater, and I think without flattering *Corneille* I may prefer his Tragedies far before those of Antiquity. I know the ancient Tragedians have had admirers in all times, but am not so sure that the sublimity ascribed to them rests upon a good Foundation.

To believe, that *Sophocles* and *Euripides* are so admirable, as we are told they are, one must fancy greater matters of their works, than can be conceived from Translations: and in my opinion, the terms and expression ought to have a great share in their beauty.

It methinks that through the praises which their most famous Advocates give them, one may perceive, that Greatness, Magnificence, and above all; Dignity, were things they little understood. Wits they were, indeed, but confined to the stock of a small Republick, to whom a necessitous liberty stood instead of all things.

When they were obliged to represent the Majesty of a great King, they ill managed an unknown grandeur, because they saw nothing but low and clownish objects, to which their senses were in a manner insensate.

It is true, that the same wits being cloy'd with those

objects, did sometimes raise themselves to what was sublime and great ; but then they brought so many Gods and Goddesses into their Tragedies, that hardly any thing more of Humanity was to be found in them : what was great, was fabulous ; what was natural, mean and contemptible.

With *Corneille*, Grandeur sets it self off, the figures he employs when he would embellish it with any ornament, are proper and suitable ; but most commonly he neglects the pomp of some certain shews, and borrows not from the Heavens, to give a value to that which is considerable enough upon Earth ; it is enough for him to enter well into things, and the full image that he gives of them, makes that true impression which men of sense love to receive.

Indeed, Nature is admirable in all things ; and when men have recourse to that foreign pomp wherewith they think to embellish objects ; it is many times a tacite confession, that they know not their property ; hence come most of our Figures and Comparisons, which I cannot approve, if they be not rare, altogether Noble and Just : otherwise it is a cunning casting about for a diversion to slip away from things which one cannot understand. What beauty nevertheless may be in Comparisons, yet they suite much better with Epick Poem than Tragedy : In Epick Poem the Mind seeks to please it self out of its subject : In Tragedy, the Soul full of thoughts, and possessed with Passions, turns not easily at the flash of a bare resemblance.

But let us return to these Ancients from whom we have insensibly digressed ; and to do them justice, let us acknowledge that they have much better succeeded in expressing the qualities of their Heroes, than in describing the magnificence of great Kings. A confused notion of the grandeurs of *Babylon* spoilt rather than raised their ima-

[3]
imagination; but their Minds could not be imposed upon in relation to Strength, Constancy, Justice and Wisdom, whereof they had instances daily before their eyes. Their Senses weaned from pomp in a mean Republick, left their Reason at greater liberty to consider men in themselves.

Thus nothing took them off from the study of Humane Nature, and from applying themselves to the knowledge of Vice and Virtue, Inclinations and Tempers: Here it is that they have learnt to give so proper characters, that justice cannot be desired according to the time they lived in. If it be thought sufficient to know persons by their actions, *Corneille* thought it not enough to make them act; he hath dived to the bottom of their Soul to search for the principle of their Actions; he hath descended into their Heart, that he may see how their Passions are formed there, and discover the most hidden ways of their Motions.

As to the ancient Tragedians, either they neglect the Passions by applying themselves to an exact representation of what occurs, or they make Speeches amidst the greatest perturbations, and tell you Sentences when you are expecting trouble and despair.

Corneille omits nothing of what occurs, and exposes all the Action as much as decency can allow; but also he gives the Thought all the extent it requires, conducting Nature without constraint, or abandoning her too much to her self.

He hath removed from the Theater of the Ancients all that was barbarous; he hath sweetened the horror of their Scene by some tender passions of Love judiciously interwoven; but his care hath not been less in preserving two tragical Subjects our Fear and Pity, without diverting the Soul from the true Passions that it ought to feel in them, to some little melancholy sight, which

though an hundred several times varied, are, for all that still the same.

What praises soever I give to that excellent Author, yet I will not say, that none but his pieces deserve applause on our Theater. We have been touched with *Mariana, Sophonisbè, Alcione, Venceslaus, Scilico, Andromache, Britanicus*, and many others, from whose beauty I pretend not in the least to derogate because I do not name them.

I avoid being tedious as much as possibly I can; and it shall be enough for me to say, that no Nation can dispute with us the excellence in Tragedies.

As for those of the *Italians*, it is not worth the while to speak of them; to name them alone is enough to breed a distaste. Their *Peter's Feast* would make a very patient man lose all patience; and I never saw it acted but that I wish'd the Author of the piece had been thunder-struck with his Atheist.

There are four or five English Tragedies, wherein, to say truth, a great many things ought to be left out, yet with that reformation they might be made excellently good.

In all the rest you see nothing but a shapeless and indigested mass, a crowd of confused adventures, without consideration of time and place, and without any regard to decency, where eyes that delight in cruel sights may be fed with murders and bodies weltering in blood.

To palliate the horreur of them by relations, as it is the custome in *France*, is to deprive the people of the sight that pleases them most.

The better-bred condemn a Custom established, through a sense of humanity perhaps; but an ancient habit, or the humour of the Nation in general, prevails over the delicateness of private persons.

To

To die, is so small a matter to the English, that there is need of Images more ghastly than Death it self to affect them : Hence it is that we upon very good ground, object to them, that they allow too much to their senses upon the Stage. We must also bear with the reproach that they make to us, of passing to the other extremity, when amongst us we admire Tragedies for the little tendernesses of Passion, which make not an impression strong enough upon the Mind ; being sometimes dissatisfied in our hearts with an evil-formed Passion, we expect a fuller emotion from the action of our Comedians. And sometimes we would have the Actor more transported than the Poet, lend Fury and Despair to an ordinary agitation, and a grief too vulgar.

The truth is, what ought to be tender is always soft ;
what ought to form Pity, scarcely amounts to tenderness ;
Emotion stands instead of Surprise, Astonishment, of
Horror.

Our Sentiments have not depth enough, and Passions not thoroughly touched, excite in our Souls but imperfect motions; that neither leave them to themselves, nor transport them out of themselves.

Урон

UPON COMEDIES.

FOR Comedy, which ought to be the representation of the actions of common Life, in imitation of the *Spaniards*, we have made it run altogether upon Gallantry, not considering that the Ancients made it their business to represent mans Life according to the diversity of humours; and that the *Spaniards* following their own *genius* have only painted out the life of *Madrid* in their Intrigues and Adventures.

I grant that that kind of work might have had a more noble air in Antiquity, with somewhat more of Gallantry too; but that was more the defect of these Ages than the fault of Authors. Now-a-days most part of our Poets know as little what belongs to Manners, as in those times they knew what belonged to Gallantry; one would say that there were no more covetous Prodigals, easie and sociable humours, no more peevish and austere natures; and as if Nature her self were changed, and men had laid aside these various Sentiments, they are always represented under one and the same Character, for what reason I cannot tell, unless it be that the Women of this Age think all men ought to be Gallants.

We are ready to acknowledge that the Wits of *Madrid* are more fertile than ours in Inventions, and that hath made us borrow from them most of our Arguments, which we have filled with passionate and amorous

rous Discourses, and reduced to more regularity and probability. The reason is, because in *Spain*, where the women are hardly ever seen, the Poet spends his imagination in contriving ingenious ways of bringing his Lovers together: And in *France*, where the liberty of Commerce is allowed, the quaintness of the Author is employed in the tender and amorous expression of the Thoughts.

A Spanish Lady of Quality not long ago, was reading the Romance of *Cleopatra*, and after a long relation of Adventures, falling upon a quaint conversation of a Lover and his Mistress alike passionate, *What a deal of wit is employ'd*, said she, *to what end so many fine words, when they are got together?*

It's one of the prettiest reflections that ever I heard made in all my life; and *Calprenet*, though a Frenchman, ought to call to mind that Lovers born in a hotter Climate than that of *France*, had very little need of words on such occasions; but the good judgement of that Lady would not be received in our ordinary gallantries, wherein one must speak a thousand times of a Passion that he hath not to be able to persuade, and meet his Mistress daily to complain to her, before he find an opportunity of putting an end to that affected pain.

The *Coy thing* of *Moliere* is made ridiculous in the matter as well as in the terms, in not reading the Romance backward, when the serious affair of Marriage is to be treated with the Parents; but it had been no false merriness with a Lover to expect his declaration, and all that comes by degrees in the progress of a Gallantry.

It is no wonder that Regularity and Probability be less to be found among the *Spaniards* than the *French*; for since all the gallantry of the *Spaniards* is derived from the *Moors*, it retains still a certain relish of *Africa*, that is uncooth to other Nations, and too extraordinary

nary to be accommodated to the exactness of Rules.

Besides, an old impression of Knight-errantry, common to all *Spain*, sets the minds of Cavaliers upon odd and freakish adventures. The Maids also from their childhood, taste of that air in their Books of Chivalry, and in the fabulous conversations of the Women that are about them. Thus both Sexes fill their minds with the same Ideas, and most part of the men and women would interpret a scrupulosity at some amorous extravagance, to be an indifference unworthy their Passion.

Though Love never observes very regular measures in any Country whatsoever; nevertheless I dare be bold to say, that it hath nothing that is very extravagant in *France*, neither in the way of making it, nor in the ordinary effects it produces. That which is called a Passionate love runs great risque of being accounted ridiculous; for Gentlemen there, minding other business, give not way to it, as the *Spaniards* do in the laziness of *Madrid*, where nothing but Love can put them in motion.

At *Paris*, the assiduity of our Court engages us to the discharge of an Office, or the design of an Employment busies us, Fortune outrivalling Mistresses in a place, where it is the custom to prefer that which one owes to himself, before that which he loves. The Ladies who are to take their measures accordingly, are also more gallant than passionate, nay and make use of Gallantry to insinuate into Intrigues.

There are but few who are not governed by Vanity and Interest; and the Gallants and their Mistresses vie who shall make the best use one of another for attaining to their end.

Love however mingles with that spirit of Interest, but it is very seldom the master; for the conduct that we are obliged to follow in affairs, shapes us into some regularity

gularity as to pleasures, or at least keeps us from extravagance.

In *Spain* there is no living without love; but what is called *to love* in *France*, to speak properly, is no more but to talk of love, and to mingle the vanity of gallantries with the sentiments of Ambition.

These differences being considered, it will not be thought strange that the Comedy of the *Spaniards*, which is no more but a representation of their Adventures, hath as little regularity as their Adventures have; and it is not to be wondered at, that the Comedy of the *French* which deviates not from their Practice, retains those respects in the representation of their Amours which commonly they have in their Loves themselves. I confess that good judgement which ought to be in all Countries of the world, establishes some things, which are no where to be dispensed with, but it is hard not to allow much to custom, since *Aristotle* himself in his Poeticks, places some times Perfection in that which was best liked at *Athens*, and not in that which is really most perfect.

Comedy hath not greater priviledges than the Laws, which though they ought all to be founded on Justice, have nevertheless particular differences, according to the different Genius of the people who made them. And if we be obliged to retain the air of Antiquity; if we must observe the character of Heroes, who have been dead Two thousand years ago, when they are to be represented upon the Stage; how is it possible not to follow the humours, and not to accommodate to the ways of those who are living, when we represent to their eyes, what they themselves daily do?

Nevertheless what authority soever Custom may give, without doubt Reason ought to have the Prerogative; but yet it ought not to be rigid in its exactness: For in things which tend onely to please, as Comedy

C

doth,

doth, it is uneasy to be subjected to too austere an Order, and to begin with the rack in Subjects wherein we seek onely for Pleasure.

OF THE Italian Comedy.

SO much I had to say of the *French* and *Spanish* Comedies ; I'll now tell you what I think of the *Italian*. I shall not speak of *Amynta*, *Pastor fido*, *Phyllis* of *Cyrus*, and of other Comedies of that nature. I ought to be better acquainted than I am with the graces of the *Italian* Language ; for though I be touched with *Amynta*, perhaps more than any *Italian*, that's because I enter into the fancy of the Poet, and have a knowledge of some things that are more delicate than those which I have of the Verses ; besides, in this Discourse I pretend onely to speak of the Comedy which appears commonly upon the Stage. What we see in *France* upon the *Italian* Stage, is not properly Comedy, seeing there is no true Plot in it ; the Subject is not well linked together, no Character strictly observed, nor Composition wherein the scope of the Genius is well diverted, at least according to some rules of Art ; here is nothing but a kind of ill formed concert amongst several Actors, of whom every one furnishes of his own head what he judges proper for the person he acts : To take it rightly, it is no more, but a medley of impertinent conceits in the mouth of Lovers, and silly Buffooneries in that of *Merry-Andrews*.

You

You find no good sense any where in it, but a kind of false Wit that predominates, either in thoughts full of Heavens, Suns, Stars, and Elements, or in an affectation of native simplicity, which hath nothing of true nature in it.

The Buffoons, I grant, are inimitable, and of an hundred that I have seen ape and imitate them, never one could come near them in Grimaces, Postures, Motions, Agility, Suppleness, and in a disposition for the making of Faces, which they can shape and alter as they please. I cannot tell whether the Mimicks and Pantomimicks of the Ancients have much surpassed them, what wonders soever we read of them. It is certain that one must be a great lover of idle Jestings and Dröllery, to be taken with what he hears; as one must be also very grave and composed not to laugh at what he sees: And it would be to affect too great a nicety, not to be pleased with their acting, because a Critick will not be satisfied with their discourse.

All Representations wherein there is but little Wit, are tedious at long run, nevertheless they surprize, and are agreeable for some time before they cloy us, as Buffoonry diverts not a man of breeding, but by little intervals: It must be put an end to partly, and the mind not allowed time to reflect upon the exactness of the Discourse, and the true and natural Idea of the thing: That Dispensation were to be desired in the *Italian Comedy*; for one distaste comes upon the heels of another with fresh irksomeness, and the variety instead of recreation, brings us onely another kind of Langor.

The truth is, when you are weary of the Buffoons that have too long kept the Stage, the Lover's step in next to oppress you: That, in my opinion, is the worst of punishments to a delicate and nice man, and one would have more reason to prefer a speedy death before

the patience of hearing them, than the *Lacedemonian* of *Bocalini* had, when he preferred the Gallows before the long and tedious reading of the War of *Pisa*, in the History of *Guichardin*: If any man fond of living, hath been able to support so killing a fatigue, instead of some agreeable diversity that may refresh his mind; all the change he finds is the impertinence of a Doctor that puts him into despair. I know that to represent the foppery of a Doctor aright, he must be made to turn all his discourse upon the Learning he possesses; but that without ever answering what is said to him, he should cite a Thousand Authors, and alleadge as many passages with a volubility that puts him out of breath; that is to bring upon the Stage a fool who ought to be sent to *Bedlam*, and not aptly to manage the impertinence of his Doctor.

Petronius follows a quite different method in the ridiculousness of *Eumolpus*. The Pedantry of *Sidias* is otherwise managed by *Theophilus*, who deserves the praise of having formed the most compleat Character that can be given to that kind of Pedants. That of *Caritides* in the *Morose* of *Moliere*, is altogether exact, nothing can be cut off from it, without disfiguring the whole piece. These are the ridiculous Learned who may be pleasantly represented upon the Stage.

But it is silly diversion for a Gentleman, to present before him a pitiful Doctor, whom Books have made a Fool, and who, as I said, ought carefully to be shut up, to keep from the sight of men the frailty of our state, and the misery of our nature.

But I must not launch out too far in my Observations upon the *Italian* Comedy. To recollect then in a few words what I have enough enlarged upon; I say that instead of agreeable Lovers, you have nothing but affected talkers of Love; instead of natural Comedians, incomparable Buffoons, but still Buffoons; instead of ridiculous

culous Doctors, poor mad Scholars: There is hardly any Part but what is forced; unless it be that of *Pantalon*, which is least esteemed, and nevertheless the onely that exceeds not the bounds of probability.

Tragedy was the chief delight of the ancient Commonwealth; and the old *Romans* endowed onely with a rough vertue, sought no other examples in their Theaters, but such as might fortifie their natural disposition, and entertain their fierce and austere Habits. When the sweetness of Wit for conversation, was joyned to the force of the Soul for great matters; then they began to delight also in Comedy, and sometimes they were pleased with high Idea's, and sometimes diverted with agreeable ones.

So soon as *Rome* grew corrupted, the *Romans* forsook Tragedy, and could not relish on the Stage an Image of ancient vertue.

From that time, to the last of the Commonwealth, Comedy was the refreshment of the Great men, the diversion of the Polite, and the amusement of a people either grown loose or softened.

A little before the Civil Wars, the *Romans* were again animated with the spirit of Tragedy, their Genius secretly disposing and preparing them for the fatal Revolutions that hapned afterward. *Cæsar* made one, and many persons of Quality did the like also, as well as he: The troubles ceasing under *Augustus*, and Peace being again restored and settled, all sorts of Pleasures were sought after.

Comedies came in play again, the Pantomimicks had their credit, and Tragedy still preserved its reputation. Under the Reign of *Nero*, *Seneca* entertained dire Idea's, which made him write the Tragedies that he hath left to us; when Corruption was at the height, and Vice universal, the Pantomimicks wholly ruined both Tragedy and Comedy; Wit had no more share in Plays, but
in

in Postures and Morions, the eye of the Spectators fought for that which might furnish their minds with voluptuous imaginations.

The Modern *Italians* are satisfied to be enlightened by the same Sun, to breath the same Air, and to inhabit the same Land, which heretofore the ancient *Romans* inhabited: but they have left to History that severe Vertue which the *Romans* practised, and therefore think they have no need of Tragedy, to animate them to hard and difficult things which they have no mind to undertake. As they love the softness of an ordinary, and the delights of a voluptuous life, so they love to act Plays that may have a relation to both; and hence came the mixture of Comedy with the art of Mimicks which we see upon the Stage of the *Italians*. And this is almost all that can be said of the *Italians* who as yet have appeared in France.

All the Actors of the Company that acts at present, are generally good Comedians, unless they act Lovers: and to do them right without love or hatred, I must say that they are excellent Players, who have very bad Plays: Perhaps they can make no good ones; perhaps they have reason not to have any; for as I was objecting one day to *Cintio* that there was not probability enough in their Pieces; he made me answer, that if there were more, good Comedians, with good Comedies might go starve.

Of

OF THE English Comedy.

THERE is no Comedy more conform to that of the Ancients, than the *English*, in what relates to Manners; it is not a pure piece of Gallantry full of Adventures and amorous Discourses, as in *Spain* and *France*; it is a representation of the ordinary way of living, according to the various humours, and different characters of men. It is an Alchymist, who by the illusions of his art, feeds the deceitful hopes of a vain *Curioso*: It is a silly credulous person, whose foolish Facility is continually abused; it is sometimes a ridiculous Politician, grave and composed, who is starched in every thing, mysteriously jealous-headed, that thinks to find out hidden designs in the most common intentions, and to discover Artifice in the most innocent actions of life: It is a whimsical Lover, a huffing Bully, a pedantick Scholar, the one with natural Extravagancies, the other with ridiculous Affectations. The truth is, these tricks and simplicities, these Politicks and other Characters ingeniously devised, are carried on too far in our opinion, as those which are to be seen upon our Stage, are a little too faint to the relish of the *English*; and the reason of that, perhaps, is that the *English* think too much, and that we commonly think not enough.

Indeed, we are satisfied with the first Images that Objects afford us; and by sticking to the bare outside, appearance for the most part stands us in stead of reality,
and

and the easie and free of what is natural. Whereupon I shall say by the by, that these two last qualities are sometimes most improperly confounded; the Easie and the Natural agree well enough in their opposition, to that which is stiff or forced; but when the point is to dive well into the nature of things, or the natural humour of persons, it will be granted me, that with facility one does not always succeed in that. There is somewhat internal, somewhat hidden that would discover it self to us, if we founded the Subjects a little more.

It is as difficult for us to enter in, as for the *English* to get out: They become Masters of the thing they think on, though they are not of their own thought; their mind is not at rest, when they possess their Subject; they still dig when there is no more to be found, and go beyond the just and natural Idea which they ought to have, by too solicitous an enquiry.

The truth is, I have never seen men of better understanding than the *French*, who apply themselves to consider, and the *English*, that can release themselves from their too deep Meditations. But to return to the facility of Discourse, and a certain freedom of Wit which, if possible, is always to be had: The best-bred Gentlemen in the world, are the *French* who think, and the *English* that speak. I shall insensibly run out into too general Considerations, and therefore must resume my Subject of Comedy, and pass to a considerable difference that is to be found betwixt theirs and ours; and that is, that we being addicted to the regularity of the Ancients, do refer all to a principal action, without other variety than that of the means that brings us to it.

It is not to be denied but that the representation of one principal Adventure ought to be the sole scope and end proposed in a Tragedy, where the Mind would feel some violence in the diversions that might avocate its thought.

The

The misfortune of an unhappy King, the sad and tragical death of a great Hero, wholly confine the mind to these important objects, and all the variety it cares for, is to know the diverse means that brought this principal action to pass ; but Comedy being made to divert and not to busie us, provided Probability be observed, and Extravagance avoided, varieties in the opinion of the *English*, are agreeable surprizes, and changes that please ; whereas the continual expectation of one and the same thing, wherein there seems to be no great matter of importance, necessarily dulls our attention.

So then instead of representing a signal cheat carried on by means all relating to the same end : They represent a notable rogue with divers cheats, whereof every one produces its proper effect by its own Constitution. As they scarcely ever stick to the unity of action, that they may represent a principal person who diverts them by different actions : so many times also they quit that principal person, that they may shew what various things happen to several persons in publick places ; *Ben Jonson* is much for that in his *Bartholomew Fair*. The same thing hath been done in *Epsom-Wells*, and in both these Comedies, the ridiculous adventures of those publick places are comically represented.

There are some other Plays which have in a manner two Arguments, that are brought in so ingeniously the one into the other, that the mind of the Spectators (which might be offended by too sensible a change) finds nothing but satisfaction in the agreeable variety they produce. It is to be confessed that regularity is wanting here ; but the *English* are perswaded that the liberties which are taken for better pleasing, ought to be preferred before exact rules, of which a barren and dull Author makes it his art to importune and cloy.

Rule is to be observed for avoiding confusion ; good
 * D fence

sence is to be followed for moderating the flight of a soaring imagination ; but Rule must have no constraint that racks, and a scrupulous reason must be banished, which adhering too strictly to exactness leaves nothing free and natural.

They who cannot give to themselves a Genius, when nature hath denied them one, ascribe all to Art which they may acquire, and to set a value upon the sole merit they have of being regular, they do what they can to damn a piece that is not altogether so. For those that love the *Ridicule*, that are pleased to see the humour of Fops, that are affected with true Characters, they will find the ingenious *English* Comedies as much or, perhaps, more to their relish, than any they have ever seen.

Our *Moliere* whom the Ancients have inspired with the true spirit of Comedy, equals their *Ben Jonson* in well representing the various humours and different ways of men, both observing in their descriptions, a true relation to the genius of their Nation : I believe they have carried that point as far as the Ancients ever did ; But it is not to be denied, but that they have had greater regard to Characters than to the main of their Subjects, the deduction whereof might also have been more methodically linked together, and the unfolding of intrigues more natural.

Up

U P O N
O P E R A S.
T O
The Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

OF a long time, my Lord, I have had a desire to tell you my thoughts of *Opera's*, and to speak to you of the difference I find betwixt the *Italian* and *French* way of singing.

The occasion that I had of speaking of it at the Dutcheſs of *Mazarine's*, hath rather encreased than ſatisfied that deſire; at preſent therefore, my Lord, I will ſatisfie it by the Diſcourſe I ſend you. I ſhall begin with great freedom, in telling you that I am no great admirer of Comedies in Muſick, ſuch as now-a-days we ſee. I confeſs I am pretty well pleaſed with their magnificence, the Machines have ſomething that is ſurprizing, the Muſick in ſome places is charming, the whole together ſeems marvellous; but it muſt be granted me alſo, that theſe Marvils are very tedious, for where the mind has ſo little to do, there is a neceſſity that the Senſes muſt languish after the firſt pleaſure that ſurprize gives us: The eyes are taken up, and at length grow weary of being continually fixed upon the Objects. In the beginning of the Conſorts, the juſtneſs of the Conſords is obſerved, and nothing eſcapes of all the varieties that unite for making the ſweetneſs of Harmony; ſome time after the

*

D 2

Inſtru-

Instruments stun us, and the Musick is no more to the ears but a confused sound that suffers nothing to be distinguished; but who can resist the tediousness of Rehearsal in a modulation which hath neither the charm of Song, nor the agreeable force of Words? The Soul tired out with a long attention wherein it finds nothing to affect it, seeks within it self some secret motion to be touched with; the Mind which in vain hath expected impressions from without, gives way to idle musing, or is dissatisfied with its own uselessness. In a word the fatigue is so universal that there is no thought but how to get out, and the onely pleasure that remains to the languishing Spectators, is the hopes of seeing a speedy end put to the show. The reason why commonly I soon grow weary at *Opera's* is that I never yet saw any which appeared not to me despicable both in the disposition of the Subject and in the Verses. Now it is in vain to charm the Ears, or flatter the Eyes, if the Mind be not satisfied, my Soul being in better intelligence with my Mind than with my Senses, struggles against the impressions which it may receive, or at least fails in giving an agreeable consent to them, without which even the most delightful Objects can never afford me great pleasure; a foppery charged with Musick, Dances, Machines and Decorations, is a pompous foppery, but still foppery; it is an ugly ground under beautiful Ornaments through which I see it with much dissatisfaction. There is another thing in *Opera's* so contrary to nature that it offends my imagination; and that is the singing of the whole piece from beginning to end, as if the persons represented had ridiculously agreed to treat in Musick both the most common and most important affairs of their life. Is it to be imagined that a Master calls his Servant, or sends him of an errand, singing; that one friend imparts a secret to another, singing; that men delibe-

deliberate in a Council, singing; that Orders in time of Battle are given singing; and that men are melodiously killed with Sword, Pike, and Musket: that's to lose the life of representation, which without doubt is preferable to that of Harmony; for Harmony ought to be no more but a bare attendant, and the great masters of the Stage have added it as pleasing, not as necessary, having regulated all that concerns the subject and discourse. In the mean time the Idea of the Musician goes before that of the Hero in *Opera's*: It is *Luigi*, *Cavallo*, and *Cessi* who are presented to the imagination. The mind not being able to conceive a Hero that sings, applies it self to him that makes the Song; and it is not to be denied but that in the *Opera's* of the *Palais Royal*, *Baptista* is an hundred times more thought of than *Theseus* or *Cadmus*. I pretend not, however, to exclude all manner of singing from the Stage; there are some things which ought to be sung, and some that may be sung without offending against Reason or Decency: Vows, Prayers, Praises, Sacrifices, and generally all that relates to the service of the Gods, are sung in all Nations, and in all times; tender and mournful passions express themselves naturally by a kind of tone; the expression of a love in its birth, the irresolution of a Soul tossed by divers motions are subject matters for Stanza's, and so are Stanza's for a Song. All men know that Quires were introduced upon the Stages of the *Greeks*, and it is not to be denied but with as good reason they might be brought in upon ours. This ought to be the distribution, in my opinion; all that belongs to Conversation, all that relates to Intrigues and Affairs, what belongs to Council and Action, is proper for Comedians who repeat, and ridiculous in the mouth of Musicians who sing it. The *Greeks* made lovely Tragedies, wherein they sang somewhat; the *Italians* and *French* make ugly ones, wherein they sing all.

Would

Would you know what an *Opera* is, I'll tell you that it is an odd medley of Poësie and Musick, wherein the Poet and Musician equally upon the rack the one for the other, put themselves hard to compose a naughty piece: Not but that you may find agreeable words and very fine airs in it; but that you will more certainly find at length a dislike of the Verses, where the genius of the Poet hath been stinted, and a surfeit of the singing, wherein the Musician is exhausted by a too-long service of Musick. Did I think my self capable of giving counsel to persons of breeding who delight in the Theater, I should advise them to reassume their relish for our good Comedies, where Dances and Musick might be introduced, that would not in the least wound the representation: there they might sing a Prologue with pleasant diversions; In the Interludes singing might animate words that should be as the life of what had been represented; after the Play ended an Epilogue might be sung, or some reflection upon the finest things in the Play; this would fortifie the Idea, and rivet the impressions that they had made upon the Spectators: Thus you might find enough to satisfy both the Senses and the Mind, wanting neither the charm of singing in a bare representation, nor the force of acting in a long continued course of Musick. It remains that I give you my advice in general for all Comedies, where there is any singing; and that is to leave to the Poet the chief authority for the direction of the piece: The Musick must be made for the Verses, far rather than the Verses for the Musick. The Musician is to follow the Poets orders, onely, in my opinion, *Baptista* is to be exempted, who knows the Passions better, and enters farther into the heart of man than the Authors. *Lamherr*, without doubt, hath an excellent Genius, proper for an hundred different Musicks, and all well managed with a just Oeconomy of Voices and Instruments:

struments : there is no recitation better understood, nor better diversified than his, according to the nature of Passions, and the quality of the Sentiments that are to be expressed. He ought to take from the Authors those lights, which *Baptista* can give them, and submit to direction; for *Baptista* through the reach of his knowledge may justly be the director. I will not put an end to my discourse without entertaining you with the small esteem that the *Italians* have for our *Opera's*, and the great dislike that those of *Italy* give us. The *Italians* who wholly apply themselves to Representation, and to a particular care of expressing things, cannot endure that we should give the name of *Opera* to a concatenation of Dances and Musick, which have not an exact-enough relation and natural suitableness to the Subjects. The *French* again accustomed to the beauty of their Entries, the delightfulness of their Airs, and charms of their Symphony, cannot away with the ignorance, or bad use of Instruments in the *Opera's* of *Venice*, and deny their attention to a long recitation, which becomes tedious for want of variety. I cannot properly tell you what this recitation of theirs is; but I know very well that it is neither singing nor reciting; it is somewhat unknown to the Ancients, which may be defined an ugly use of Song and Words. I confess I have found things inimicable in the *Opera* of *Loüigi*, both as to the expression of thought, and the charm of Musick; but the ordinary recitation was very cloying, insomuch that the *Italians* themselves impatiently expected those fine parts which in their opinion came too seldom. I shall in a few words comprehend the greatest defects of our *Opera's*; one thinks he is going to a representation, where nothing will be represented; and expects to see a Comedy, but finds nothing of the life of a Comedy. So much I thought I might say concerning the different constitution of *Opera's*.

ra's. For the manner of singing which we in *France* call *Execution*, I think without partiality that no Nation can reasonably vie with us in that. The *Spaniards* have an admirable disposition of throat; but with their warblings and shakings, they seem to mind nothing in their singing, but to contend with Nightringales for the facility of the Windpipe. The *Italians* have the expression counterfeit, or at least forced, as not knowing exactly the nature or degree of Passions; It's a bursting out in laughter, rather than singing, when they would express any sentiment of joy; if they would sigh, you shall hear sobs with violence formed in the throat, and not sighs which unawares escape from the passion of an amorous heart; of a doleful reflection they make the strongest exclamations; the tears of an absence are the mournings of a Funeral; sadness becomes so sorrowful in their mouths, that in grief they roar rather than complain; and sometimes they express the languishing of a passion, as a natural fainting. Perhaps there may be at present some alteration in their way of singing, and that by conversing with us they are advantaged as to the neatness of a polite *execution*, as we are improved by them as to the beauties of a stronger and bolder composition. There are Comedies in *England* wherein there is much Musick; but it is impossible for me to speak more discreetly of it, I cannot accustom my self to the *English* singing. I came too late to find a relish in that which is so different from all others. There is no Nation that shews greater courage in the Men, more beauty in the Women, nor more wit in both Sexes. One cannot have all things, where so many good qualities are common, it is not so great a misfortune that a good judgement in singing is rare; it is certainly very rarely to be met with there; but they in whom it is to be found, have it as nice and delicate as any people in the world,

world, as exceeding most part of their Nation in exquisite air, and most happy constitution. *Totus Gallus cantat*, none but the *Frenchman* sings; I will not be injurious to all other Nations in maintaining what an Author hath published, *Hispanus flet, dolet Italus, Germanus boad, Flander ululat, & solus Gallus cantat*, I leave to him all these pretty distinctions; and shall only back my opinion by the authority of *Louigi*, who could not endure that the *Italians* should sing *Airs*, after that he had heard Mr. *Vyert*, *Hilaire*, and *La Pésse Varenne* sing. Upon his return to *Italy* he made all the Musicians of the Nation his Enemies, saying openly at *Rome*, as he had said at *Paris*, that to make pleasant Music, *Italian* *Airs* must be in a *French* mouth. He made little account of our Songs, except *Beausfets*, which gained his admiration: He admired the Consort of our Violins, our Lutes, Harpsicords and Organs: He was ravished at his first hearing the great Bells of *St. Germain de Prée*; and how would he have been charmed with our Flutes, if they had been in use in those times? It is most certain, that he was much disgusted with the harshness and rudeness of the greatest Masters of *Italy*; when he had tasted the sweetness of the touch, the neatness and manner of the *French*. I should be too partial, if I insisted only upon our advantages: there is no people that have a slower apprehension both for the sound of words, and for humouring the thought of the Composer than the *French*; there are but few that less understand the quantity; and that with greater difficulty find the pronunciation; but after that by long study they have surmounted all these difficulties, and that they are masters of what they sing, nothing takes like to them. This same thing happens to us upon Instruments, and particularly in Consorts, where there is nothing very sure nor just.

E

till

till after an infinite number of repetitions; but nothing
 is that not so polite, when once the repetitions are ac-
 complished. The *Italians* profound in Musick bring
 their art to our ears without any sweetness. The
French not satisfied to take from the skill the first
 harshness, that shews any labour of the Composi-
 tion; they find in the secret of execution, as if it were a
 charm for our Souls, and I know not what that tou-
 ches, which they carry home to the very heart. I for-
 got to speak to you of the Machines, so easie it is to
 forget things which one would willingly have laid aside:
 Machines may satisfy the curiosity of ingenious peo-
 ple for the mathematical Inventions, but they'll ne'er
 please persons of good judgement in the Theatre; the
 more they surprize, the more they divert the mind
 from attending to the Discourse; and the more admi-
 rable they are, the impression of that rarity leaves the
 less tenderness and exquisite perception in the Soul
 which it needs, for being touched or charmed with the
 Musick. The *Ancients* made no use of Machines, but when
 there was a necessity of bringing in some God; nay,
 and the Poets themselves were almost always lookt up-
 on as ridiculous for suffering themselves to be reduced
 to that necessity. If men love to be at expences, let
 them lay out their money upon lovely Decorations;
 the use whereof is more natural and more agreeable
 than that of Machines. Antiquity which made Gods
 no strangers to Poets, and exposed them even in their
 Chimney-corners; that Antiquity, I say, how vain and
 credulous soever, exposed them nevertheless but very
 rarely upon the Stage. Now the belief of them is
 gone, the *Italians* in their *Opera's* have re-established
 the Heathenish Gods in the world, and have not bog-
 led to entertain men with these ridiculous Vanities,

pro-

provided they might make their Pieces look great by the introduction of that dazzling and surprizing appearance; these divinities of the Stage have long enough abused *Italy*, which being happily undeceived at length, does now renounce the same Gods which it had recalled, and returns to things which in truth have not the same exactness, but which are not so cumbersome, and with a grant of indulgence not to be rejected by men of sense.

It hath happened to us in the matter of Gods and Machines, as it happens almost daily to the *Germans* about our Modes and Fashions, we just take up what the *Italians* have laid aside. And as if we would make amends for the fault of being prevented in the invention, we run into excess in a custom which they imperitently introduced, but which they managed with reserve. In truth we cover the Earth with Deities, and make them dance and descend in Troops, whereas they made them descend but sparingly, on the most important occasions. As *Ariosto* wronged the grandeur of Poems by incredible Fabulosity, so we wrong Fabulosity by a confused muster of Gods, Shepherds, Hero's, Enchanters, Apparitions, Furies, and Devils.

I admire *Baptista* as well for the diversion of Dances, as for what concerns the Voices and Instruments; but the Constitution of our *Opera's* must appear very extravagant to those who are true Judges of Probability and surprizing Grandeur; nevertheless one runs risk of having his Judgement called in question, if he dare to shew it; and I advise others, when they hear any discourse of the *Opera*, to make their knowledge a secret to themselves. For my part, who have past the age and time of signaling my self in the world by the spirit of modes, and the merit of Fancy, I am resolved to strike

strike in with good sense, for all it is so forsaken, and to follow Reason though in disgrace with as much assiduity as if it were still in chief vogue. That which vexes me most at this madness for *Opera's*, is that they tend directly to the ruine of the finest thing we have, which is most proper for elevating the Soul, and most capable to form the mind. After this long discourse let us conclude, that the Constitution of our *Opera's* cannot be more defective than it is. But it is to be acknowledged at the same time, that no man can perform more than *Lully* upon an ill-conceived Subject, and that it is not ealie to outdo *Quinault* in what is demanded of him.

F I N I S.
